WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

| 1 | 1. A method of collecting an electronic signature for an electronic |
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| 2 | record stored in a database, the method comprising: |
| 3 | automatically creating an electronic record from data stored in a |
| 4 | plurality of different database tables in response to the occurrence of a predetermined |
| 5 | event; |
| 6 | storing an instance of the electronic record in a common repository of |
| 7 | electronic records that provides an audit trail that cannot be altered or disabled by users |
| 8 | of the system; |
| 9 | executing a rule associated with the electronic record to determine |
| 10 | whether an electronic signature is required to connote review and/or approval of the |
| 11 | electronic record; and |
| 12 | if execution of the rule results in a determination that an electronic |
| 13 | signature is required, marking the instance of the electronic record as unsigned and |
| 14 | initiating a request to collect the required electronic signature. |
| 1 | 2. The method of claim 1 further comprising receiving an electronic |
| 2 | signature from the user; verifying the electronic signature; and in response to a positive |
| 3 | verification of the electronic signature, marking the electronic record as signed. |
| 1 | 3. The method of claim 2 wherein the electronic record is stored in |
| 2 | a common repository of electronic records that provides an audit trail that cannot be |
| 3 | altered or disabled by users of the database. |
| 1 | 4. The method of claim 1 wherein the electronic record comprises |
| 2 | unstructured data in a character large object (CLOR) format |

6. The method of claim 4 wherein fields of the electronic record are filled with XML data based on a predefined mapping to multiple data sources.

well-formed XML document stored within a column of a table stored in the database.

The method of claim 3 wherein the unstructured data comprises a

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| 1 | 7. The method of claim 1 further comprising the step of, if |
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| 2 | execution of the rule results in a determination that an electronic signature is required, |
| 3 | displaying data from the electronic record on a computer display. |
| 1 | 8. The method of claim 7 wherein data from the electronic record is |
| 2 | display according to a predefined layout set forth in an XSL style sheet. |
| 1 | 9. The method of claim 1 wherein the rule requires a plurality of |
| 2 | different electronic signatures and wherein, if execution of the rule results in a |
| 3 | determination that a plurality of electronic signatures are required, requesting the |
| 4 | plurality of electronic signatures. |
| 1 | 10. The method of claim 1 wherein the electronic record is initially |
| 2 | marked as unsigned by setting an appropriate attribute associated with a database table |
| 3 | in which at least part of the record is stored. |
| 1 | 11. A computer system that manages electronic records stored in a |
| 2 | database, the computer system comprising: |
| 3 | a processor; |
| 4 | a database; and |
| 5 | a computer-readable memory coupled to the processor, the |
| 6 | computer-readable memory configured to store a computer program; |
| 7 | wherein the processor is operative with the computer program to: |
| 8 | (i) automatically create an electronic record from data stored in |
| 9 | a plurality of different database tables in response to the occurrence of a |
| 10 | predetermined event; |
| 11 | (ii) store an instance of the electronic record in a common |
| 12 | repository of electronic records that provides an audit trail that cannot be altered |
| 13 | or disabled by users of the system; |
| 14 | (iii) execute a rule associated with the electronic record to |
| 15 | determine whether an electronic signature is required to connote review and/or |
| 16 | approval of the electronic record; and |

| 17 | (iv) mark the instance of the electronic record as unsigned and |
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| 18 | initiate a request to collect the required electronic signature if execution of the |
| 19 | rule results in a determination that an electronic signature is required. |
| 1 | 12. The computer system of claim 11 wherein the electronic record |
| 2 | is stored in a common repository of electronic records that provides an audit trail that |
| 3 | cannot be altered or disabled by users of the system. |
| 1 | 13. The computer system of claim 12 wherein the electronic record |
| 2 | comprises unstructured data in a character large object (CLOB) format. |
| 1 | 14. The computer system of claim 13 wherein the unstructured data |
| 2 | comprises a well-formed XML document stored within a column of a table stored in the |
| 3 | database. |
| 1 | 15. The computer system of claim 14 wherein fields of the electronic |
| 2 | record are filled with XML data based on a predefined mapping to multiple data |
| 3 | sources. |
| 1 | 16. The computer system of claim 11 wherein the processor and |
| 2 | computer program are further operative to obtain and verify the electronic signature, |
| 3 | and thereafter, mark the electronic record as signed. |
| 1 | 17. The method of claim 16 wherein the processor and computer |
| 2 | program are further operative to initially mark the electronic record as unsigned by |
| 3 | setting an appropriate attribute associated with a database table in which at least part of |
| 4 | the record is stored. |
| 1 | 18. A computer program stored on a computer-readable storage |
| 2 | medium for managing electronic records stored in a database, the computer program |
| 3 | comprising: |
| 4 | code for automatically creating an electronic record from data stored in a |
| 5 | plurality of different database tables in response to the occurrence of a predetermined |
| 6 | event: |

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| 7 | code for storing an instance of the electronic record in a common |
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| 8 | repository of electronic records that provides an audit trail that cannot be altered or |
| 9 | disabled by users of the system; |
| 10 | code for executing a rule associated with the electronic record to |
| 11 | determine whether an electronic signature is required to connote review and/or |
| 12 | approval of the electronic record; and |
| 13 | code for marking the instance of the electronic record as unsigned and |
| 14 | initiating a request to collect the required electronic signature if execution of the rule |
| 15 | results in a determination that an electronic signature is required. |
| 1 | 19. The computer program of claim 18 wherein the electronic record |
| 2 | is stored in a common repository of electronic records that provides an audit trail that |
| 3 | cannot be altered or disabled by users of the system. |
| 1 | 20. The computer program of claim 19 wherein the electronic record |
| 2 | comprises unstructured data in a character large object (CLOB) format. |
| 1 | 21. The computer program of claim 20 wherein the unstructured data |
| 2 | comprises a well-formed XML document stored within a column of a table stored in the |
| 3 | database. |
| 1 | 22. The computer program of claim 21 wherein fields of the |
| 2 | electronic record are filled with XML data based on a predefined mapping to multiple |
| 3 | data sources. |
| 1 | 23. The computer program of claim 18 wherein the computer |
| 2 | program further comprises code for obtaining and verifying the electronic signature, |
| 3 | and thereafter, marking the electronic record as signed. |
| 1 | 24. The method of program 23 wherein the computer program |
| 2 | further comprises code for initially marking the electronic record as unsigned by setting |
| 3 | an appropriate attribute associated with a database table in which at least part of the |
| 4 | record is stored. |
| 1 | 25. A method of collecting an electronic signature for an electronic |
| 2 | record stored in a database, the method comprising: |

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| 3 | automatically creating an electronic record in response to the occurrence |
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| 4 | of a predetermined event, wherein the electronic record comprises unstructured, well- |
| 5 | formed XML data stored in a character large-object (CLOB) format; |
| 6 | storing an instance of the electronic record in a common repository of |
| 7 | electronic records that provides an audit trail that cannot be altered or disabled by users |
| 8 | of the system; |
| 9 | executing a rule associated with the electronic record to determine |
| 10 | whether an electronic signature is required to connote review and/or approval of the |
| 11 | electronic record; and |
| 12 | if execution of the rule results in a determination that an electronic |
| 13 | signature is required, marking the instance of the electronic record as unsigned; |
| 14 | requesting the electronic signature; |
| 15 | after obtaining the electronic signature, verifying its authenticity; and |
| 16 | if the electronic signature is verified as authentic, marking the electronic |
| 17 | record as signed. |

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